

De autoritaire verleiding werd sterker en sterker. Daarbij was de invloed van gewezen activisten op de partij stilaan veel groter geworden dan die van de gewezen frontsoldaten.

Luc Vandeweyer

ANNE GODFROID

La guerre après la Guerre? L'occupation belge de la rive gauche du Rhin (1918-1930)

Bruxelles, Editions de l'ULB, 2023, 332p.

The Allied occupation of the German Rhineland after the First World War succeeded to some extent in enforcing the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, but it also failed to prevent, and possibly contributed to, Hitler's accession to power in 1933, his reoccupation of the Rhineland in 1936, a second occupation of Belgium by Germany in 1940, and a second occupation of Germany by the same Allies in 1945. The Rhineland occupation is therefore an important phase in the history of military occupations in the twentieth century – a field that has undergone a revival in recent years as historians explore the occupiers' strategies of rule, the experiences of those living under occupation, relations between occupier and occupied, and the memories and legacies of invasion, occupation and foreign rule.

The Rhineland occupation is perhaps most noteworthy for the lack of unity between the Allied occupiers. Anne Godfroid's *La guerre après la Guerre?* is therefore especially welcome in providing a Belgian perspective and a detailed and meticulously researched history of *la quatrième zone d'occupation*. During this occupation, Belgium and Belgians were not passive victims (as they have often been portrayed under German rule between 1914 and 1918 and again between 1940 and 1944), but active participants with their own view of how the occupation should be conducted in accordance with the laws of war and the national interests of their country (p.16-17). With an area of around 5.5 million square kilometres and a population of 1.5 million, the Belgian zone was similar in size to the US and British zones, though significantly smaller than the French zone. The US withdrew after the Senate refused to ratify the Treaty of Ver-

sailles, though it retained observer status at the Inter-allied High Commission and US troops stayed in Germany until 1923. Though militarily less powerful than France or Britain and with fewer economic resources, Belgium was more than a junior partner in the occupation.

Godfroid's focus is on the early years of occupation. The first four chapters cover the period from the Armistice in November 1918 to the invasion of the Ruhr and attempted separatist coup in 1923, with a short final chapter on the 'period of détente' from mid-1924 to the end of the occupation in 1930. She provides abundant evidence that when Belgian soldiers first crossed the border into Germany in December 1918 and early 1919 they were animated by hate and a desire for revenge (p. 33), often based on personal experiences during the war or under German occupation. The fighting had ceased but the process of 'cultural demobilisation' – a return to mentalities generally prevalent during peacetime – progressed slowly, if at all. The replacement of troops who had fought in the war by young conscripts to form a permanent army of occupation made little difference as they were inexperienced and fearful of coming under attack. Public statements by army commanders, such as General Gilain who declared (*Aux*) '*jeunes soldats à se tenir prêts à ramasser l'épée qui est tombée de la main défaillante de leurs aînés*' (p. 116) in November 1922, reinforced the sense that this early period was indeed *La guerre après la Guerre*. Based on a detailed analysis of court records, Godfroid shows that tensions increased throughout 1921 and 1922, reaching a peak during the Ruhr crisis when twelve Belgian servicemen were killed in a sabotage attack on a train at Hochfeld in June 1923 (p. 228-9).

In stark contrast to the army command, the Belgian high commissioner Édouard Rolin-Jaequemyns is portrayed as a man of peace, who viewed the occupation as a means of securing the implementation of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, not as a vehicle for revenge and punishing the former enemy. He was determined to conduct the occupation in accordance with the international laws of war as

specified in the Hague Regulations, which he had helped formulate as the Belgian representative (p. 80). The open dissension between the civil and military actors involved in the occupation is one of the major themes of the book. Rolin-Jaequemyns wrote in 1925 that his principal adversary during the occupation was the chief commander of the Belgian army of occupation (General Rucquoy), whose overriding concern was the safety of his soldiers, who disregarded rules that protected the local population, and fostered a spirit of hate and revenge (p. 284-5). The administration of justice, which was the responsibility of the occupation authorities, was a tool used by both sides, civil and military, to pursue their divergent strategies of power: equity and the rule of law on the one hand, and punishment and oppression on the other. Belgians tried in the military courts received lighter sentences for similar offences than Germans, which contributed to subsequent memories, exploited and exaggerated by Nazi propaganda, of the Belgian occupation as harsh, unfair and oppressive. (p. 286-7)

In conclusion, Godfroid suggests subjects for further research, including the transfer of experiences from one case of occupation to another; comparisons of the Belgian zone with the French and British zones or with occupations during and after the Second World War; and profiling leading military personnel to illuminate how earlier experiences influenced their later attitudes and behaviour. In *La guerre après la Guerre?* she has written a definitive study of a previously under-researched case of occupation, placed it clearly within the context of research on occupation studies and the aftermath of war, and opened numerous potential avenues for further research.

Christopher Knowles

MARKUS WEGEWITZ
Antifascistische Kultur, Nico Rost und der lange Kampf gegen den Nationalsozialismus, 1919-1965
Göttingen, Wallstein Verlag, 2023, 471 p.

Dit boek is de handelsuitgave van een doctoraatsverhandeling die in 2021 verdedigd werd aan de Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena. Het boek ver-

weeft op boeiende wijze de levensgeschiedenis van de Nederlandse publicist, journalist en vertaler Nico(laas) Rost met analyses en beschouwingen over het voor- en naoorlogse antifascisme.

Het gaat meer bepaald om het historische antifascisme zoals het ontstond binnen communistische politieke organisaties. Wegewitz stelt immers, meer dan terecht, dat anarchistische, liberale, conservatieve of andere tegenstanders van het fascisme zich hoe dan ook tot deze specifieke vorm van antifascisme dienden te verhouden. Wat uiteindelijk deels de ideologische inkleding van de (geo-)strategische belangen van de Sovjetunie was ('Volksfront'-politiek, 1935-1939), bracht bovendien de al even ideële als uiterst wendbare 'volksfront-gedachte' voort. De betekenis ervan strekte zich ver voorbij haar (geo-)politieke ontstaanscontext uit. Hoewel het naar eigen zeggen steeds een 'massabeweging' probeerde te zijn, bleef het antifascisme de aangelegenheid van een sociologische en politieke minderheid.

Dat geldt bij uitstek voor de door Wegewitz onderzochte variant die zich richtte op "de politisering van het cultuurleven" en dan in het bijzonder de Duitstalige schriftcultuur. Deze schriftcultuur werd binnen een dergelijke politisering onder meer als de "humanistische tegenpool" van het nationaalsocialisme voorgesteld. Intrigerend is daarbij het zelfbeeld van het antifascisme dat naar gelang de context kon worden aangepast, maar zelden werd afgestoten of volledig werd verdrongen. Het antifascisme kon zich daardoor moeiteloos handhaven voorbij de politieke structuren van de jaren twintig en dertig.

Kortom, dit is allerminst een zogenaamde ideologie-geschiedenis van 'het antifascisme'. Wegewitz ambieert een 'ervaringsgeschiedenis' waarbinnen de actoren zich de historische werkelijkheid doorheen concrete praktijken toe-eigenen. Een dergelijke geschiedenis laat namelijk toe om een langetermijnperspectief op het antifascisme te ontwikkelen. De complexe verhouding tussen het historische antifascisme (1922-1945) en de naoorlogse periode staat daarbij centraal.